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ABSTRACT

The roles and conduct of teachers and principals have emerged as good indicators of effective schools. Research is presently being conducted on parent involvement and its effect on student learning. Good teacher-student interaction is crucial to effective learning. Teachers must have high expectations for students. Their techniques for transferring knowledge must be efficient and thorough. If used properly, methods such as mastery learning can improve achievement. Principals of effective schools must have high expectations for students. Strong instructional leadership techniques will make it clear that learning is the focus of the school. A positive school climate can be maintained if administrators are supportive of teacher needs and institute a joint decision-making process. While teachers and principals are responsible for developing strong ties between school and home, parents can try to maintain a positive home environment which is conducive to academic achievement. The important home factors include the following: (1) work habits and daily schedule of the family; (2) available parental guidance, support, and assistance for the child's school and homework; (3) intellectual stimulation; (4) language development; and (5) parents' academic aspirations and expectations. More research is needed to know if effective school techniques are applicable to all students at all grade levels. (VM)

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TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

Since the inception of the effective schools movement more than a decade ago, researchers and practitioners have been working to construct a model of school effectiveness. Today, several characteristics—mainly those concerning the roles and conduct of teachers and principals—have emerged as the best, although not perfect, answers to the question of what makes an effective school. Meanwhile, a newer, less-developed segment of the effective schools research is addressing parent involvement and its effect on students' learning experiences.

Teachers

Good and extensive teacher-student interaction and classroom dynamics are crucial to effective learning. The research clearly indicates these three essential characteristics of effective teachers:

High Expectations: Effective teachers must believe that each student has the capability to succeed academically, and that they, their teachers, are the ones who will help make the difference in students' levels of achievement (Brophy, 1979). High expectations can be demonstrated in several ways. For instance, teachers can move assuredly through the required curriculum at a brisk pace, covering necessary material and always demanding that students work up to their capacity. Teachers should also offer frequent praise and encouragement, emphasizing student's capabilities instead of their negative performances; encourage them to talk; and use their ideas in class.

Time-on-Task: Effective teachers adopt efficient and thorough techniques for transferring knowledge and spend all or most of their class time "on task," i.e., direct teaching. Time-on-task is the percentage of the time within a school day used by students actively engaged in learning, and this should be as high as possible (Mann and Inman, 1984, p. 258). Teachers who fill the school day with learning activities that students are able to master will successfully cover more material. Beginning class on time and keeping the discussion, lecture, or seatwork moving continuously are just some of the methods for raising the percentage of time-on-task.

Mastery Learning: A third but less universally accepted concept of effective teaching involves teaching basic skills through the mastery learning technique (Edmonds, 1979). As opposed to conventional teaching in which students are taught and tested on material once, mastery learning uses tests as a form of continuous feedback to teachers, enabling them to determine the areas where students need corrective procedures, more instruction, and subsequent tests.

Thus, material will be taught until it is mastered, and students will not be passed through the system until they have proven their comprehension of the required curriculum. Except for one-on-one tutoring—a luxury few schools can afford—mastery learning has been proven the most effective technique in developing students' attitudes toward learning.

Yet, the mastery learning practice has remained one of the most controversial of the established effective schools characteristics; a contingent of experts find it short-sighted and harmful in the long-run. Studies have shown that when a great deal of emphasis is placed on tests, teachers will either teach to the test or teach testing (Stedman, 1985). Further, teachers may begin to emphasize only the basic skills found on the standardized tests, giving less attention to other educational goals—acquiring higher-level thinking skills, learning to make decisions, developing self esteem, etc. (Stedman, 1985).

Principals

A principal, as the instructional and managerial leader of the school, is considered essential to the creation and maintenance of an effective school atmosphere. Here are a few effective principal characteristics:

High Expectations: For many of the same reasons that teacher expectations are paramount to student performance, a principal's belief in students' ability is also crucial. Further, the principal can espouse high expectations throughout the school and help teachers appreciate their potential impact on the performance of many students.

Effective principals recruit outstanding teachers who want to assist in helping achieve the goals of the school, demand more from them, and hold them accountable for the progress of their students. Because effective principals believe that all students can learn, they will not allow students to be labeled unteachable.

Strong Instructional Leadership: Edmonds (1979) found that effective schools have a clear instructional focus and a clearly stated mission that embraces instruction, teaching, and learning. These are derived from principals knowledgeable about effective instruction and involved in curriculum development and teacher supervision. Principals should also monitor and evaluate teachers' performance on an on-going basis by sitting in on classes.

Creating a Positive School Climate: A principal can also make a school more effective by developing and maintaining an orderly school atmosphere, and ensuring that creating order doesn't displace academic achievement as most important (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984), or limit time-on-task (Rosenholtz, 1985). Principals can further buffer teachers by providing adequate materials, and not overburdening them with nonacademic activities such as paperwork, lunchroom monitoring, and watching children in the playground.

Another technique to help principals create a positive school environment is school-based planning, i.e., a joint decision making process. By emphasizing collaboration in making changes within the school so everyone will understand the reasons behind decisions, and encouraging feedback from teachers as well as other staff members—cafeteria workers, custodians, etc., a principal will generate a feeling of joint ownership in the school. Students, detecting this sense of common purpose among the adults in the building, will want to become a part of it also.

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Parents

The body of effective schools research that examines parent involvement—helping children before they arrive and after they leave school—is the newest and least well-defined. Education researchers who have studied parent involvement agree that, especially in low-income situations, the responsibility of developing a strong school-home bond rests upon the principal and teachers (Epstein, 1987). While not "letting the school off the hook," it emphasizes the importance of the parental role.

Bloom (1984, p. 10-11) points to several environment factors that play a leading role in students' achievement or failure:

- work habits and daily schedule of the family;
- available parental guidance, support, and assistance for a child's school- and homework,
- intellectual stimulation;
- langauge development; and
- parents' academic aspirations and expectations for their children.

Of these, parental expectation is the most crucial and the easiest to adjust (Mann, 1984). As with the teacher and principal expectation research, the most recent effective schools findings emphasize the necessity of parental encouragement and support throughout a child's school years. The research also suggests that the best way to improve home support for learning begins with a dialogue between the school and the home (Bloom, 1984).

Many educators advocate home visits by teachers and daily open school visitation for parents. Also essential is communication through frequent phone calls, progress reports, and newsletters to inform parents of students' obligations. Bringing parents into the schools as volunteers, or providing school-based programs for parent education, are highly recommended methods of helping parents help their children.

In too many instances schools do not assist parents in becoming involved in their children's education, and may even consider them part of the problem of low student achievement. But an effective school of the late 1980s and 1990s needs to communicate to parents what they are expected to do to support their child's efforts, and to identify a variety of ways in which parents can reinforce the school program.

Application of Techniques

Some education researchers warn against the premature application of the effective schools techniques into schools whose populations differ from those where the techniques were proven to be effective. For example, findings indicate that schools serving students of economically deprived backgrounds are forced to focus on very limited set of learning objectives in order to achieve a high level instructional effectiveness (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). In such a situation, the term "mastery learning" might mean mastering small quantities of basic information and missing broad concepts of knowledge.

The effective schools techniques may not be transferable from the elementary schools, where most of it was formulated and tested, to the junior and senior high schools. Basic structural differences (a more diverse curriculum and less time spent with one teacher in the higher grades) coupled with the age difference (older children are less easily influenced and more set in their ways of thinking and attitudes toward school) may prevent the same techniques from working equally well in both environments (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Hence, an all-inclusive answer to the question of what makes an effective school simply does not exist. The literature, however, identifies a useful list of characteristics that, when tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each school, will, at the very least, help educators and students create an effective school.

—**Amy Stuart Wells**

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